ANNEX A

DRAFT

An Assessment of Draft Health Warning Regulations Proposed by National Health and Welfare under the Tobacco Products Control Act

by

Robert E. Burnkrant and Roger D. Blackwell

The Ohio State University

College of Business

1775 College Road

Columbus, Ohio 43210

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This paper addresses issues raised by the draft health warning regulations proposed by National Health and Welfare under the Tobacco Products Control Act. The draft regulations were outlined in a July 29, 1988, letter from A. J. Liston to manufacturers and importers of tobacco products. Our conclusions are as follows:

- The messages proposed to be presented in the arrow-circle symbol are classic fear-appeal messages. It has been found that such messages, if not accompanied by constructive admonitions, can produce the opposite of the intended behaviour.

- The size and format of the proposed health warnings seem designed to "force" consumers to attend to the warnings. Research demonstrates that such an approach is unnecessary. Consumers will not avoid the warnings simply because the warnings advise them to abandon a favored activity.

- Because the size and format of the proposed health warnings seem designed to "force" consumers to attend to the warnings, there is a significant chance of a "boomerang" effect. Consumers are likely to discount or ignore the warnings because the warnings seem to "demand" compliance.

- The pictogram format would "forewarn" consumers, in the arrow segment, of the message that appears in the circle segment. Such forewarnings of an intent to persuade are regarded by consumers as a form of forced exposure and are discounted or ignored accordingly.

- One study has found that neither the use of a pictogram nor the strength of signal words or the use of capital letters in warnings affects perceptions of a brand's safety or recall of the warning information. For this additional reason, the proposed arrow-circle symbol is misconceived.

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THE MESSAGE

Each message briefly presents a harmful effect attributed to consumption of tobacco products. In fact the specification of the harmful effect is the entire message. This type of message is known as a "fear appeal message" because it focuses on the harmful effects of a behavior. Newborn and Rogers (1979) found that manipulating fear seemed to have no direct effect on a person's intention to perform the recommended course of action, and they also found that increasing the level of reassurance would lead to an increase in the level of intention to perform the recommend behavior.

In an earlier study that focused on the effectiveness of fear appeals involving three different topics, one of which was cigarette smoking, it was also found that increasing the level of fear in the message did not have a direct effect on intention to perform the recommended response (i.e., Rogers and Newborn 1976). Two other factors were also manipulated in this experiment -- probability of occurrence and perceived efficacy of the recommended course of action. In the portion of the study dealing with cigarette smoking, it was found that when smokers were not provided with assurances that the available coping responses (e.g., quitting smoking) "were extremely effective methods of avoiding the threatened event" (p. 57) increasing the perceived probability of occurrence of the harmful effects addressed in the message reduced subjects' intention to perform the recommended response. Thus, without reassurances

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smokers who were told that "if one smokes cigarettes, there is a very high chance of contracting lung cancer" stated a lower intention to stop smoking than subjects exposed to a message that stated "the chances of any given smoker actually developing cancer are very small."

In another study, Rogers and Deckner (1975) found that people who were reassured that the allegedly harmful effects of smoking are reversible and that quitting would greatly reduce chances of getting lung cancer reported in follow up studies that they were smoking less than those who were not given the reassuring message. This study also found that increments in fear alone did not have a suppressive effect on cigarette consumption. The results of this and other related studies as well as literature reviews also support the position that fear alone is insufficient to lead people to perform the recommended action or the action desired by the policy maker (e.g., Leventhal, Safer and Panagis 1983; Leventhal and Hirschman 1982).

Finally, a study by McArdle (1972) compared the effects of a fear appeal emphasizing the negative consequences of performing a detrimental behavior with either no message or messages which were developed on the basis of Fishbein and Ajzen's (1975) theorizing. Messages based on Fishbein and Ajzen (1975) focused on the desired behavior rather than the detrimental behavior. McArdle's fear appeal messages contained statements much like the proposed warning statements in that they focused on the negative consequences of continuing to per-

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form the behavior under consideration. Significantly, McArdle (1972, see also Fishbein and Ajzen 1975) found that the fear appeal message was less effective than no message at all in motivating people to take the desired action, and the messages that focused on the desired action were more effective than either the fear appeal message or the no message control.

In conjunction with the preceding arguments on the effects of fear appeals it is interesting to note that there is some evidence to suggest that smokers may have somewhat lower self-esteem than nonsmokers. Tucker (1984) employed Cattell's 16 PF inventory and Rosenberg's self-esteem scale to examine individual differences between people who intend to smoke and those who intend not to smoke. People who intend to smoke were found to be lower in self-esteem than people who intend not to smoke. Of the twenty individual difference variables examined by Tucker (1984), self-esteem was the most powerful predictor of intention to smoke. These results are interesting because other evidence suggests that fear appeals may be counterproductive for people who are relatively low in self esteem (cf. Beck and Frankel 1981; Leventhal 1970).

The preceding paragraphs reviewed literature which leads to the conclusion that the extreme negative nature of the draft warnings proposed under the Tobacco Products Control Act may be relatively ineffective in motivating people to stop smoking. It suggests the importance of a more positive reas-

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suring message, if the intended goal is to be pursued with any hope of success.

LOCATION AND SIZE OF THE MESSAGE

The required size and obtrusiveness of the message and the requirement that it be located on the principal panels of the product seem to be designed to force consumers' attention to the warning under the assumption that if attention is not forced the warning will be avoided. Whether it was designed for this purpose or not it is likely to be perceived as an attempt to force exposure to the warning. In the following paragraphs we address the validity of the idea that it is necessary and desirable to force attention in this manner.

Is it necessary to force exposure to the warning information?

It is a popular assumption that consumers will actively avoid information that conflicts with their behavior. Indeed this prediction followed directly from the theory of cognitive dissonance (Festinger 1957). The theory argues that when a person acts in a manner that is inconsistent with his or her beliefs a state of dissonance is aroused which is an aversive or undesirable "drive state." Because dissonance is an aversive state, people are motivated to reduce dissonance or avoid dissonance provoking situations. It follows from this theory that one way dissonance can be reduced is to avoid information that is inconsistent with or in conflict with the individual's behavior. A considerable body of research has

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examined this issue and found that consumers do not actively avoid information that conflicts with their behavior or opinions. Therefore, it is unnecessary to "force" cigarette health warnings on consumers. This research is briefly reviewed below.

Mills, Aronson and Robinson (1959) manipulated cognitive dissonance and found no difference between groups in preference for supportive information. They also found no evidence that people avoid discrepant information. Although Mills (1985) found that high dissonance subjects showed a stronger desire to read information about a chosen product than low dissonance subjects, no evidence of the avoidance of discrepant information was found.

Other research indicates that the usefulness of information is what is important whether or not the information is supportive of the people's prior decisions. This conclusion is supported by both Canon (1984) and Freedman (1965) as well as others. In fact Freedman found that dissonant information was preferred to consonant information when it was more useful. The research that addressed these issues prompted Greenwald and Ronis (1978, p. 54) to maintain that the hypothesis that people will avoid information that will likely increase dissonance (i.e., discrepant information) "has had sufficient disconfirmation to have been, in effect dropped from the theory."

Cigarette smoking has frequently been employed as a topic in information seeking studies because cigarette smoking

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and the belief that cigarette smoking leads to lung cancer are dissonant cognitions. In one study (i.e., Feather 1962), a sample of people, some of whom were cigarette smokers, were asked to rank order several magazine articles in terms of their interest in reading them. One of the articles was "Smoking Leads to Lung Cancer." In direct contradiction to dissonance theory, it was found that cigarette smokers were more interested in reading this article than nonsmokers. It was also found that "smokers who are relatively firm in their opinion that there is no convincing evidence of a positive relationship between smoking and lung cancer show more interest in the article than do smokers who hold the opposite opinion about the evidence" (Feather 1962, p. 50). In another study (Brock 1965), although preference was found for supportive information evidence of the avoidance of discrepant information was not found.

In a more recent study Frey (1981) found that for revocable decisions (and cigarette smoking may be regarded as revocable), as dissonance increases preference for supportive information over discrepant information declines. It was suggested that a point may even be reached beyond which subjects prefer dissonant information to consonant information.

In a more recent study, Frey (1982) argued that when dissonance is very high and the decision is revocable, people should prefer dissonant information over consonant information. His results indicate that, as dissonance increases, the rela-

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tive preference for consonant information declines. Although the presentation of the results was not as clear as it could have been, the findings suggest that at moderate and high levels of loss dissonant information is preferred to consonant information. The author makes the point that those findings would be likely to occur only when the decision is revocable. It is likely that these differential effects on information seeking of revocable versus irrevocable decisions are due to the greater usefulness of dissonant information when decisions are revocable.

From this brief review we may conclude that cigarette smokers will not avoid discrepant information (i.e., information that argues against smoking). It is, therefore, not necessary to force exposure to warning information. We turn now to a consideration of the desirability of forcing exposure.

Is it desirable to force exposure to the warning information?

Psychological reactance. The theory of psychological reactance assumes that a person generally feels free to select his own position in regard to an issue. It is predicted that when the person's attitudinal freedom is threatened by attempts to influence or change his or her beliefs, the person will react against this attempt. Reactance will oppose those forces which would otherwise lead to acceptance of the message; and, if reactance is strong enough a "boomerang" effect (i.e., change in the opposite of the intended direction) will occur. Several

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studies, to be reviewed below, have examined this issue and found support for psychological reactance predictions.

The obtrusive nature of the pictogram and key word will make it quite likely that the consumer will see at least this part of the warning every time the consumer looks at the tobacco product package. This forcing of exposure is very likely to produce unintended negative consequences. It may be argued that the pictogram and key word as well as the proposed size and placement of the warnings on the tobacco product panels will produce psychological reactance by being perceived as an infringement of the consumers' choice regarding whether or not to process the warning message and whether or not to hold whatever positions they see fit. Psychological reactance would have the effect of increasing resistance to the message over any resistance that would occur if the information were presented in a less obtrusive fashion. Psychological reactance may even produce a boomerang effect (i.e., increased acceptance of the other side of the issue). In the paragraphs below literature is reviewed on the conditions under which psychological reactance is aroused and its effects.

Brehm and Sensenig (1988) had subjects make a series of two alternative choices. In one condition a fictitious person sent them a note telling them which alternative to select. Subjects who were told which alternative to choose were found to be significantly less likely to choose that alternative than subjects who were not told. In another study

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(i.e., Sensenig and Brehm 1988) these researchers found that being told what side to take on an issue, even when that side agrees with the subjects' initial opinion, led to attitude change away from the initial position (i.e., a boomerang effect). The content and obtrusive nature of the proposed warnings seem to force exposure, as noted above, and tell people what side to take on the issues under consideration in the warnings. The prior research suggests that psychological reactance resulting from this approach will lead to less persuasion than a milder, less obtrusively presented message. In fact, the prior research suggests that the proposed presentation of the warning may even produce a boomerang effect. That is, it may produce a change in the opposite direction from the one intended.

There is evidence that persuasive communications that demand compliance produce shifts in attitude away from the intended position and that this is particularly likely to occur for people who are initially in agreement with the position taken in the message. For example, Worchel and Brehm (1970) exposed people to a message with which they either agreed or disagreed. In one case the message was stridently written in a manner suggesting that people cannot believe otherwise whereas in the other case the message was written in a less strident fashion. Worchel and Brehm (1970) found that subjects who initially agreed with the position taken in the message moved away from the position taken in the message when

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it was presented stridently. Other research has reported similar results (e.g., Wicklund and Brehm 1968, Snyder and Wicklund 1976).

The results indicate that when the advocacy of a message threatens people's freedom to decide for themselves what position to take there is a tendency to turn away from the position advocated in the message, and this tendency is particularly strong for people who are initially in agreement with the position. This has detrimental implications for the tobacco product warnings given the large percentage of people who are already aware of the harmful effects of the products. Given the findings of the research reviewed above, there is reason to believe that these people are likely to be particularly adversely affected by a message structure which forces exposure and seems to impinge on their freedom to hold whatever position they deem appropriate.

Other research which also supports the detrimental effects of psychological reactance comes from studies which show that a "soft sell" is more effective than a "hard sell". These studies are reported in Brehm and Brehm (1981). According to Brehm and Brehm (1981), McGillis and Brehm (1975) found a significant reduction in purchases of the recommended brand by females when a hard sell was used relative to a soft sell. Gilbert and Peterson (1971) did not find a sex effect in a similar study, although they found the lowest level of pur-

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chase in the condition in which the highest pressure was exerted.

Also in accordance with the predictions of psychological reactance, although lacking some controls that would be desirable, is a study by Herman and Leyens (1977) in which the effects of warnings were examined. The warnings which were examined in this research were warnings broadcast by French-speaking Belgian Television regarding the movies it presents. The researchers examined panel survey data regarding movies that were shown on Thursday evenings in the period 1972-1975. Some of the movies carried no warning, other carried a violence warning and/or sex warning. If warnings were broadcast they were broadcast three times -- on the day before the movie, at the beginning of the evening of the movie and just before the movie.

If the warnings were perceived by people as pressure or an infringement on their freedom to choose the program they want, psychological reactance could be aroused by the warning motivating people to reestablish their freedom. One of the most direct ways this could be accomplished would be to react against the warning by actually watching the movie that was the subject of the warning. In fact, the results obtained by Herman and Leyens are consistent with psychological reactance. Movies containing warnings attracted a significantly larger audience than those that did not contain warnings.

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appears in the pictogram as proposed, consumers of the product who notice this, and most probably will, will be given a "forewarning" about the topic of the warning message. A body of literature has examined the effects of giving this type of forewarning, and we turn now to a consideration of this literature.

Studies which have examined this issue have found that forewarning people about the topic of a message that disagrees with their prior position results in increased resistance to persuasion when the topic is personally relevant to the subjects and people are allowed time to think about their position on the issue (e.g., Freedman and Sears 1965, Petty and Cacioppo 1977, see also Cialdini and Petty 1981). The draft warning messages are personally relevant to the consumers of tobacco products; and, as is pointed out below, people who are exposed to the pictogram and key word portion of the proposed warnings may take as much time as they want to think about the issue prior to reading the warning message. Thus, we may expect that providing the proposed pictogram and capitalized word will have the effect of increasing resistance to the warning message.

It has been found that resistance to persuasion is directly related to time delay between the forewarning and exposure to the message which follows this warning. It is believed that this time between warning and message exposure is used to rehearse arguments that favor one's own side of the issue and oppose the position taken in the message (Petty and

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Cacioppo 1977). In the laboratory, time delay is manipulated by specifically giving subjects varying amounts of time between the warning and the message. However, when people are exposed to the warning in the natural environment, there is no requirement that they process the message at a particular point in time. These people can easily take all the time they want to rehearse opposing thoughts prior to their exposure to the message. This rehearsal will lead to greater resistance to the message.

A closely related type of forewarning is the forewarning of the intent to persuade. Consumers who read the messages will quickly learn to recognize the pictogram and capitalized word and learn that the intent of the message telegraphed by this word symbol combination is to persuade them to form beliefs in accordance with points made in the message. The form of the proposed warnings, including the arrow and circle symbols and the large size and form of the message may be regarded, as noted earlier, as forcing exposure. They represent a clear and obvious attempt to induce people to adopt the recommended conclusion. As such, the literature on the forewarning of intent to persuade is relevant to a consideration of the effectiveness of the proposed warnings. Studies have shown that when people are warned of the communicator's persuasive intent, attitude change is less positive than when they are not forewarned (e.g., Hass and Grady 1975, Petty and Cacioppo 1978). In contrast to forewarning of mes-

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sage topic, forewarning of intent to persuade does not require time delay between forewarning and message to have detrimental effects on persuasion. The explanation for these counterproductive effects of forewarning of intent to persuade is based on psychological reactance. The persuasive intent of the communicator is seen as an infringement of the recipient's freedom to decide for him or herself how he or she feels about the issue. Petty and Cacioppo (1986) argue that when a warning of persuasive intent occurs and involvement is high, as it is in the case of on package tobacco product warnings, the nature of the information processing changes. Subjects become less objective and more intent on finding fault with the message arguments in order to reassert their attitudinal freedom.

In another study that examined these issues, both perceived freedom and forewarning were varied, and it was found that either reduced perceived freedom or forewarning is sufficient to produce attitude change away from the position advocated in the message (Heller, Pallak and Picek 1973). The most change away from the advocated position occurred when there was both low perceived freedom and forewarning of the intent to persuade. As suggested above, this most counterproductive condition seems to be most consistent with the implications of the current warning proposal.

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A WARNING STUDY

Finally, we may consider a study (i.e., Urzic 1984) that examined the effectiveness of using a pictogram or a word

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in capital letters on warnings. The warnings were not likely to involve the negative effects addressed above because subjects had considerable choice regarding the information they would process, and they were simply asked to examine the information and rate each of the several brands in terms of its effectiveness and safety. The warnings did not argue against use of products which were already being used but rather provided information about how the products could be used more safely. It was found that the use of pictogram, the strength of a signal word and the use of capital letters in safety warnings did not affect perception of a brand's safety or effectiveness and it did not affect recall of the warning information.

Robert E. Burnkrant
Roger D. Blackwell

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